

# Ikwerre language

**Ikwerre**, also spelt as **Ikwere**, is a language spoken primarily by the Ikwerre people who inhabit Rivers State, Nigeria.

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## Classification

The Ikwerre language is classified as an Igbo dialect. The classification of Ikwerre as an Igbo dialect however is a subject of controversy among some in the Ikwerre community due to political reasons. Based on lexicostatistical analysis, Kay Williamson originally asserted that the Ikwerre, Ekpeye, Ogba, Etche and Igbo languages belonged to the same language cluster, but were not dialects.<sup>[4]</sup> Subsequent studies by both Williamson and Roger Blench concluded that Igbo, Ikwerre, Ogba and their sister languages apart from Ekpeye form a "language cluster" and that they are somewhat mutually intelligible.<sup>[5]</sup> There are indications that the Ikwerre society was bilingual even in the pre-colonial Nigeria, with people speaking other Igbo dialects and Ikwerre.<sup>[6]</sup>

## Phonology

### Vowels

Ikwerre distinguishes vowels by quality (frontedness and height), the presence or absence of nasalization, and the presence or absence of advanced tongue root.

|      |      | Front | Back |
|------|------|-------|------|
| High | +ATR | ɪ ĩ   | u ũ  |
|      | −ATR | ɪ ḭ̃  | ʊ ʊ̰ |
| Mid  | +ATR | e ě   | o ɔ̃ |
|      | −ATR | ɛ ḛ̃  | ɔ ɔ̰ |
| Low  | −ATR | a ǎ   |      |

| Ikwerre         |   |
|-----------------|---|
| Pronunciation   | <span>[ikʷéré]</span>   |
| Native to       | Igbo  |
| Region          | Ikwerre, Rivers State   |
| Ethnicity       | Ikwerre/Igbo  |
| Native speakers | (200,000 cited 1973) <sup>[1]</sup>   |
| Language family | <div>Niger–Congo <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li> Atlantic–Congo<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Volta–Niger<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>YEAI<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Igboid<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Ikwerre</b></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></div> |
| Dialects        | Apara, Ndele, Ọgbakiri, Ọbịọ, Akpor Alụụ, Ịbaa, Elele <sup>[2]</sup>  |
| Writing system  | Latin script  |
| Language codes  |   |
| ISO 639-3       | ikw   |
| Glottolog       | ikwe1242 ( <span>http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/ikwe1242</span> ) <sup>[3]</sup>   |

There is also a vowel \*/ǝ/ which is posited to explain syllabic nasal consonants in accounts of the language which state that Ikwerre has no nasal stops. This sound is realized as [ɛ̃] or a syllabic nasal which is homorganic to the following consonant.

## Vowel harmony

Ikwerre exhibits two kinds of vowel harmony:

1. Every vowel in an Ikwerre word, with a few exceptions, agrees with the other vowels in the word as to the presence or absence of advanced tongue root.
2. Vowels of the same height in adjacent syllables must all be either front or back, i.e. the pairs /i/ & /u/, /ɪ/ & /ʊ/, /e/ & /o/, and /ɛ/ & /ɔ/ cannot occur in adjacent syllables. Vowels of different heights, however, need not match for frontness/backness either. This doesn't apply to the first vowel in nouns beginning with a vowel or with /r/, and doesn't apply to onomatopoeic words.

## Consonants

|                             |                    | <u>Bilabial</u> | <u>Labiodental</u> | <u>Alveolar</u> | <u>Postalveolar or palatal</u> | <u>Velar</u>     |                | <u>Glottal</u>   |                |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|--------------------|-----------------|--------------------------------|------------------|----------------|------------------|----------------|
|                             |                    |                 |                    |                 |                                | <u>Unrounded</u> | <u>Rounded</u> | <u>Unrounded</u> | <u>Rounded</u> |
| <u>Plosive or affricate</u> | <u>Voiceless</u>   | p               |                    | t               | tʃ                             | k                | kʷ             |                  |                |
|                             | <u>Voiced</u>      | b               |                    | d               | dʒ                             | g                | gʷ             |                  |                |
| <u>Fricative</u>            | <u>Voiceless</u>   |                 | f                  | s               |                                |                  |                |                  |                |
|                             | <u>Voiced</u>      |                 | v                  | z               |                                |                  |                |                  |                |
| <u>Non-plosive stop</u>     | <u>Voiced</u>      | ɸ~m             |                    |                 |                                |                  |                |                  |                |
|                             | <u>Glottalized</u> | ʼɸ~ʼm           |                    |                 |                                |                  |                |                  |                |
| <u>Tap</u>                  |                    |                 |                    | r~ɾ             |                                |                  |                |                  |                |
| <u>Approximant</u>          |                    |                 |                    | l~n             | j~j̥                           | ɰ~ɰ̊             | w~ẘ           | h~h̊             | hʷ~h̊ʷ         |

The oral consonants [ɸ ʼɸ l r j ɰ w h hʷ] occur before oral vowels, and their nasal allophones [m ʼm n ɾ̃ j̃ ɰ̃ w̃ h̃ h̃ʷ] before nasal vowels. The "non-explosive stops" [ɸ ʼɸ] are not plosives (not pulmonic), and are equivalent to implosives in other varieties of Igbo.

The tap /r/ may sometimes be realized as an approximant [ɾ].

## Tone

Ikwerre is a tonal language.

## Agbirigba

Ikwerre has an in-group variant, or cant, Agbirigba, that is meant to prevent understanding by outsiders.

## References

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